



THE TAX DIVIDE

Assessor's estimates defy logic, benefit lawyers

JOSE M. OSORIO/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Cook County Assessor Joseph Berrios is required by state law to revalue property every three years, yet his methods are hidden from the public.

A new analysis of commercial properties finds thousands of identical values, high error rates

By Jason Grotto and Sandhya Kambhampati | A Chicago Tribune/ProPublica Illinois collaboration

Amid the most tumultuous real estate market since the Great Depression, Cook County Assessor Joseph Berrios produced valuations for thousands of commercial and industrial properties in Chicago that did not change from one reassessment to the next, not even by a single dollar.

That fact, one finding in an unprecedented ProPublica Illinois-Chicago Tribune analysis of tens of thousands of property records, points to a conclusion that experts say defies any logical explanation except one:

Berrios failed at one of his most important responsibilities — estimating the value of commercial and industrial properties.

What's more, a separate analysis reveals commercial and industrial property assessments throughout Cook County were so riddled with errors that they created deep inequities, punishing small businesses while cutting a break to owners of high-value properties and helping fuel a cottage industry of politically powerful tax attorneys.

And because commercial and industrial properties as a group were not assessed properly, residential homeowners across the county were forced to carry an additional and unnecessary burden, paying more in property taxes than they would have otherwise.

State law says the assessor must revalue property every three years. Yet Berrios, using methods hidden from the public, repeatedly produced initial valuations of commercial and industrial properties — known as first-pass values — that did not change.

For example, as the financial crisis cratered the real estate market in 2009, Berrios' predecessor estimated the value of a stout brick building in a bustling commercial area on Chicago's Northwest Side at \$13,455,132.

Three years later, in 2012, Berrios had taken office and the commercial real estate market had come roaring back.

Why CPS chief, ally of mayor, had to go

Claypool's exit part of pattern during Emanuel's tenure

By Bill Ruthhart and Hal Dardick
Chicago Tribune

It was the type of top-notch send-off that few receive at City Hall, and certainly no one who departs under a dark ethical cloud.

One by one, school board members, religious leaders and even Mayor Rahm Emanuel stepped to the microphone to praise soon-to-be-former Chicago Public Schools CEO Forrest Claypool.

"I've known Forrest for 30-plus years, the whole time in my life of public life and public service, and I want to thank Forrest for his exemplary service to the city of Chicago. Wherever he has worked he has left an incredible and indelible mark on every endeavor," a visibly tired Emanuel said. "I can say he can walk out with his head high, because he did a job well. And he will always be my friend."

It was left to Claypool himself to nod at why he was resigning, and the coda he offered was vague: "I hope that when this chapter of my career is written, people will say, 'Even good men can make stupid mis-

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Aging boomers facing shortage of caregivers

Few qualified workers, rising costs and a massive demographic shift have newly minted seniors facing a crisis. **Business**

Southern Calif. 'like a war zone' as wildfires grow

Hundreds of buildings have been destroyed and others remain at risk as more than a half-dozen blazes burn. **Nation & World, Page 25**

Poet Perkins gains new fame for 'Hey Black Child'

Poem often recited in schools credited to others by mistake

BY CHRISTOPHER BORRELLI
Chicago Tribune

For a long time, if you stumbled across the poetry of Useni Eugene Perkins, there was a fair chance you thought you were reading the work of Maya Angelou.

It's often credited this way online. Which might be flattering to Perkins, except many more people seem to think he's Countee Cullen, a Harlem Renaissance poet who died in the 1940s. In fact, Perkins, who lives off Jackson Park, is 85 and looks very much alive, a testament to his years as a long-distance runner. Still, confusion over his legacy has lasted for decades.

Also, he is not Langston Hughes.

Or Gwendolyn Brooks.

Two more poets he's mistaken for.

Recently, after an African-American arts website posted video of a 3-year-old Chicago girl reciting "Hey Black Child," Perkins' best-known (and most misidentified) poem, with a note explaining that Perkins is the author, not Cullen, a reader left this comment: "You insult my black heritage to covet that which is not yours. Tell the truth."

The truth is, Useni Eugene Perkins wrote "Hey Black Child."

A longtime fixture of the South Side art scene, Perkins was a leader of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and '70s, which sought to distance its art from European influences, encouraging fresh Afro-

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ABEL URIBE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Useni Eugene Perkins, a Chicago writer and social worker, was a leader of the Black Arts Movement.

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